

The Honorable Kymberly K. Evanson

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON  
AT SEATTLE**

STATE OF WASHINGTON, et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION, et al.,

Defendants.

NO. 2:25-cv-01228-KKE

DECLARATION OF RICHARD A.  
TANKERSLEY

**DECLARATION OF RICHARD A. TANKERSLEY**

I, Richard A. Tankersley, declare under the penalty of perjury pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746 that the foregoing is true and correct:

1. I am the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies of Portland State University. I am over the age of 18 and have personal knowledge of all the facts stated herein, including knowledge based on my experience and information provided to me. If called as a witness, I could and would testify competently to the matters set forth below.

2. I submit this Declaration in support of the Plaintiff States' Motion for Preliminary Injunction.

**Background**

3. I joined Portland State University in August 2023 and currently serve as the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies. Prior to this role, I was the Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where I focused on expanding research capacity. For more than 30 years, I have held faculty and research positions at institutions such as Gonzaga University, the University of Maryland Baltimore County and the Florida Institute of Technology. I hold a Ph.D. in biology from Wake Forest University.

4. Based on my work as Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies at Portland State University and my work as Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development at UNC Charlotte, I have overseen research offices with annual sponsored research portfolios of \$50 million or more, including a significant number of federally sponsored awards. I also served as a Program Director in the Division of Graduate Education, Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR) at the National Science Foundation from August 2012-

1 August 2016. My combined experience as an administrator, researcher and former NSF Program  
2 Director provides me with a deep understanding of federally sponsored awards, including the  
3 rigor with which proposals are reviewed and awards are both allocated to and managed by  
4 Universities such as Portland State.

5 5. My role includes overseeing Portland State's Sponsored Projects and  
6 Administration office, which works with PI Evan Elkin and co-PI Brooke Rizor on the School-  
7 Based Mental Health Workforce Development Project, Award #S184X230130, which Portland  
8 State University received as part of the Department's Mental Health Service Professional  
9 Demonstration Grant Program.

10 **Portland State University**

11 6. Portland State University is a public research university in Portland, Oregon. It  
12 was established by the State of Oregon to provide public higher education and research for the  
13 benefit of the state and its residents. It was founded in 1946 to provide access to higher education  
14 and opportunity for veterans home from World War II, and it has remained committed to meeting  
15 the needs of individual students and society as a whole. In 1952 the campus was moved to  
16 downtown Portland, Oregon where it has grown into Oregon's Urban Research University with  
17 more than 200 degree programs. Portland State University has a single campus with  
18 approximately 15,885 undergraduates and 4,585 graduate students enrolled in Fall 2024. In Fall  
19 2024, Portland State University employed approximately 5,212 employees, including research  
20 and instructional faculty, academic professionals and managers, administrators, classified staff,  
21 and student employees. Portland State University boasts a diverse range of research facilities  
22 supporting various disciplines, from advanced science and engineering laboratories to  
23 specialized centers focused on urban and environmental issues. These facilities provide students  
24

1 and faculty with access to state-of-the-art equipment and collaborative spaces to conduct  
 2 impactful research addressing real-world challenges. Portland State University plays a vital role  
 3 in Oregon's economy, not only through its educational and research activities but also as a key  
 4 contributor to employment and economic stability in the region. Its workforce spans academic,  
 5 research, administrative, and operational roles, supporting a broad array of university functions.  
 6 By offering living-wage jobs and serving as an anchor institution in downtown Portland, PSU  
 7 strengthens the local economy and enhances the state's overall economic resilience. Beyond its  
 8 direct employment, PSU's overall economic contribution is substantial. Recent estimates put  
 9 PSU's total annual economic impact at \$1.6 billion statewide. This figure includes both direct  
 10 and indirect effects, such as employee spending, student and visitor expenditures, and the  
 11 economic activity generated by university operations and construction projects. PSU also  
 12 generates an estimated \$64.3 million in annual tax revenue, further reinforcing its importance as  
 13 a public asset that helps fund state and local services. This impact extends across sectors,  
 14 supporting businesses, stimulating job growth, and enhancing the vitality of the Portland  
 15 metropolitan area and Oregon as a whole.

16 **The Department's Funding and Discontinuance of School-Based Mental Health**  
 17 **Workforce Development Project**

18 7. The Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant (MHSP) attracts  
 19 candidates for school-based mental health professions, including School Social Work and  
 20 Counseling, and provides training opportunities for students in rural and other high-needs Local  
 21 Educational Agencies (LEAs) (also referred to as school districts or educational service  
 22 districts). MHSP facilitates partnerships between high-needs school districts and institutions of  
 23 higher education, allowing opportunities for interns to obtain required training and clinical  
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1 supervision to prepare them for careers in school mental health and to increase additional  
2 children's and youth's access to school mental health services.

3 8. Portland State University applied for a multi-year MHSP grant on January 27,  
4 2023.

5 9. In its application, Portland State University explained the critical factors  
6 impacting the safety and well-being of students, including the lack of critical mental health  
7 services in partner LEAs. All but one of the LEAs are located in designated US Health Resources  
8 & Services Administration Health Professional Shortage Areas in Mental Health (as outlined in  
9 the original funding opportunity announcement), which identifies areas where there are not  
10 enough mental health service providers to meet the community's needs.

11 10. Oregon's 2022 Student Health Survey data report highlighted that nearly 35% of  
12 students surveyed described their mental health as fair or poor. In 2022, an Oregon Health  
13 Authority report also identified suicide as the second leading cause of death among Oregonians  
14 aged 10 to 24. To help address the critical challenges surrounding student mental health and  
15 safety, Portland State University identified LEA partners serving high-need communities with  
16 populations at greatest risk and most impacted by a lack of mental health services in schools to  
17 partner with for the project. Factors utilized in the initial LEA identification for this grant  
18 included designation as a high-need school, their Oregon Department of Education District  
19 Profiles, a Health Professional Shortage Area designation, and resource access challenges and  
20 service isolation. The LEAs identified include a total enrollment number of over 74,399 students  
21 who were being served by only 35 total school social workers. This lack of student support  
22 highlights the critical need to increase the number of school social workers in each LEA to  
23 address inadequate mental health support available in the schools.

1           11. To meet the MHSP program priorities, Portland State University proposed the  
 2 following goals for its MHSP project: Place 73 Master of Social Work (MSW) interns with  
 3 LEAs; Increase the number of hired school social workers by 100% - from 35 current school  
 4 social workers to 70; 75% of students placed with LEAs will be recruited from local LEA  
 5 communities; Provide 70 K-12 School Social Work Licenses; Offer 300 Continuing Education  
 6 Units (CEUs) through Continuing Education Program; Train 150 school staff in school-wide  
 7 framework; Train 73 MSW interns in SB-SBIRT; Train a total of 500 individuals across the  
 8 grant.

9           12. On March 30, 2023, the Department awarded Portland State University, School-  
 10 Based Mental Health Workforce Development Project, Award No. S184X230130. The original  
 11 Grant Award Notification is attached as Attachment A. The performance period for this grant  
 12 was April 1, 2023 through December 31, 2027, with authorized funding for the initial budget  
 13 period of April 1, 2023 through December 31, 2024.

14           13. The Department granted continuation awards that funded subsequent budget  
 15 periods for a total of \$3,507,781 for the first three years of the project. Most recently, the  
 16 Department issued a Grant Notification Award, obligating continuing funding to fully fund the  
 17 third year for this grant on December 19, 2024 in the amount of \$941,650. The current budget  
 18 period started on January 1, 2025 and ends on December 31, 2025. That document is attached  
 19 as Attachment B.

20           14. Since the Department has awarded Portland State University this grant all  
 21 required reports have received satisfactory acceptance and Portland State University is on track  
 22 to meet or exceed the stated program goals. Most notably, Portland State University has already  
 23 trained 100 school staff in the school-wide mental health model; at the conclusion of the current  
 24

1 funding period will have delivered 150 Continuing Education Units, and placed 16 MSW interns  
2 all of whom represent the partner LEA communities

3 15. In my experience, discontinuance of a project's funding is rare and I have never  
4 had a project's funding discontinued or terminated. To my knowledge, prior to 2025,  
5 discontinuance or termination has only occurred in cases of misconduct, typically with prior  
6 notice and opportunities to respond and correct any underlying issues.

7 16. Nevertheless, on April 29, the Department sent notice that Portland State  
8 University's MHSP award would be discontinued at the end of the grant's current budget period,  
9 which is December 31, 2025. Given that the Department originally approved this grant's  
10 performance period through December 31, 2027, Portland State University faces a loss of  
11 \$2,396,111 in prospective funding, including \$1,196,194.00 that it had expected to receive for  
12 the upcoming 2026 funding cycle. The Department's discontinuation notice is attached as  
13 Attachment C.

14 17. The Department issued the notice without prior process or communication, no  
15 chance to remedy, and no specific rationale – despite Portland State University's documented  
16 compliance and satisfactory performance. It purported to discontinue the grant based on 34  
17 C.F.R. § 75.253(a)(5) and (f)(1). These regulations allow the Department to not continue a grant  
18 if it determines that continuation of the project is not in “the best interest of the Federal  
19 Government.” 34 C.F.R. § 75.253(a)(5); 34 C.F.R. § 75.253(f)(1). In making this determination,  
20 the Department limited its considerations to “any relevant information regarding grantees’  
21 performance.” 34 C.F.R. § 75.253(b). However, this notice failed to cite anything regarding  
22 Portland State University's performance.  
23

18. Rather it “determined that the grant specified above provides funding for programs that reflect the prior Administration’s priorities and policy preferences and conflict with those of the current Administration.” It then went on in boilerplate fashion to list a mishmash of reasons, claiming the programs: “violate the letter or purpose of Federal civil rights law; conflict with the Department’s policy of prioritizing merit, fairness, and excellence in education; undermine the well-being of the students these programs are intended to help; or constitute an inappropriate use of federal funds.” Based on this boilerplate language, Portland State University has no way of knowing which reason(s) applied as the Department’s basis for discontinuing the MHSP grant for School-Based Mental Health Workforce Development Project.

**Harms from the Department’s Decision to Discontinue Portland State University’s Grant**

19. The discontinuance of the Portland State University’s MHSP grant will end the School-Based Mental Health Workforce Development Project causing irreparable harm.

20. Although Portland State University can still access funding through the end of our current budget period on December 31, 2025, Portland State University is already experiencing the harmful effects of this discontinuance.

21. The termination of this federally funded program has already begun to cause significant disruption to staffing, student support, and essential program infrastructure at Portland State University. Without continued funding, the institution faces immediate and cascading consequences that affect both current operations and long-term program viability:

- Disruption of faculty-led training programs and structured support for clinical skills development.



- 1 • Loss of PSU's Continuing Education Program expansion, which was set to deliver over
- 2 300 CEUs to school-based professionals statewide.
- 3 • Post-graduate licensure supervision, previously funded, will no longer be available,
- 4 impacting job readiness and workforce entry.
- 5 • Loss of teaching load support and integration for SBIRT (School-Based Screening, Brief
- 6 Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) frameworks.
- 7 • Elimination of positions responsible for coordinating field placements, continuing
- 8 education and training, student supervision, and advising.
- 9 • Loss of two Director-level positions (Elkin and Rizor), whose roles are currently funded
- 10 by this project. These positions will become unfunded FTE, creating an urgent need to
- 11 identify alternative funding to retain them. Both Principal Investigators (PIs) impacted,
- 12 who play critical roles in fundraising and program development, face a reduction below
- 13 50% FTE and may be forced to seek other employment.

14 22. Moreover, if the Department does not rescind its discontinuation decision, it will  
 15 create significant disruption to the behavioral health workforce, resulting in severe impacts  
 16 including:

- 17 • Students will face licensure barriers, as Portland State University is the only institution
- 18 in Oregon authorized to grant a School Social Work License. Many students will be
- 19 unable to complete their required clinical hours, leading to delays or disqualification
- 20 from licensure.
- 21 • Attrition risk will increase significantly. Without this program, students may need to
- 22 extend their graduation timelines, take on additional debt, or withdraw from the
- 23 program altogether.

- 1       • The behavioral health workforce pipeline will be severely disrupted. Seventy-three
- 2       social work interns were slated to serve seven school districts, collectively reaching
- 3       more than 75,000 students. This abrupt termination halts their placement and
- 4       professional development midstream. In addition, 25 new interns projected for the
- 5       2026-2027 school year will no longer be placed.
- 6       • The decision will worsen existing provider shortages in Oregon, particularly in rural
- 7       and frontier areas, which already face a 65% deficit in behavioral health professionals.
- 8       This is especially concerning given that suicide is the second leading cause of death for
- 9       Oregonians aged 10 to 24.
- 10      • Schools will lose vital support professionals who assist with attendance, discipline de-
- 11      escalation, and early mental health triage. The absence of these supports may
- 12      negatively affect school readiness, compromise student safety, and lead to declines in
- 13      academic performance and behavioral health outcomes.
- 14      • Portland State University's role as Oregon's lead public training institution for school
- 15      mental health professionals will be undermined, weakening the state's overall capacity
- 16      to respond to the youth mental health crisis.
- 17      • Portland State University's longstanding partnerships with school districts will suffer
- 18      reputational damage. Many districts committed staffing, resources, and strategic
- 19      partnerships based on multi-year collaboration agreements, all of which are now at risk.
- 20      23.     In addition, there are currently 13 students who have committed to internship
- 21      placements at LEAs involved in this project across multiple terms, whose placement could be
- 22      disrupted due to the ending of the placement stipend. The loss of \$10,000 stipends previously
- 23      provided to MSW students completing field placements threatens degree completion for those
- 24

1 unable to afford unpaid internship hours. These students have already been recruited and placed  
2 in high-need LEAs. This puts at risk graduating on time and increases unplanned financial  
3 burden, ultimately harming the likelihood that they pursue employment at LEAs.

4 24. There is no way to recover lost time or restore continuity once disrupted, and staff  
5 who depart will take their training and expertise with them, requiring new investment in  
6 recruitment, hiring, and training.

7 25. Even if the Department were to re-bid MHSP funds, and Portland State University  
8 were to receive a new grant award, the harm would already be done. The termination of this  
9 program has resulted in significant harm due to the interruption of service continuity and the loss  
10 of institutional knowledge critical to program effectiveness. Further, the non-continuation notice  
11 was released just as the K-12 2024/2025 school year was ending, causing significant disruptions  
12 to planning for now only half of the 2025/2026 school year. The specific impacts include:

- 13 • The disruption of school-based mental health services will prematurely sever established  
14 clinical relationships between interns and students, undermining continuity of care and  
15 impeding student progress.
- 16 • Clinical supervision and training sequences for MSW interns have been interrupted,  
17 delaying the development of required competencies and progress toward eventual  
18 licensure.
- 19 • Institutional knowledge accumulated through multi-year collaborations with LEAs has  
20 been destabilized or lost.
- 21 • Districts that had integrated intern support into their tiered systems of care must now  
22 rapidly adjust, often without qualified replacements, which diminishes the quality and  
23 consistency of mental health and behavioral support services available to students.

- The sudden loss of these placements reduces the number of qualified graduates entering the behavioral health workforce in the near term, with consequences for statewide workforce development goals.

### **Conclusion**

26. The discontinuance of Portland State University's MHSP grant undermines Portland State University's Mission to "Led Knowledge Serve the City" by serving as a vibrant center for learning, scholarship, research, creativity, and community engagement within Oregon; as well as the Department's "mission to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the Nation." 20 U.S.C. § 1228a(a). This discontinuance makes it harder to train and secure talent and to fund providers so that our children may access mental health services. To meet budgetary deadlines, Portland State University and its partners are making difficult decisions in the next few weeks and are already in the process of terminating staff positions that support this program and informing graduate students that they have lost significant tuition assistance. These harms are ongoing and imminent, and will be irreparable if they are not stopped.

27. On June 30, 2025, Portland State University withdrew its request for reconsideration.

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1 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the  
2 foregoing is true and correct.

3 DATED this 1st day of July 2025, at Portland, Oregon.

4  
5 Richard A.  
6 Tankersley

Digitally signed by Richard A. Tankersley  
Date: 2025.07.01 18:02:27 -07'00'

7 Richard A. Tankersley  
8 Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies  
9 Portland State University  
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